

Do Numbers Equal Strength?

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“Yes” and “No.” The Bible urges Christians to grow and mature in the faith and to thereby become strong (Eph. 6:10, et al.). What God desires for His individual saints, He also desires for the local congregations of His church.

Most people can hardly conceive of success in any field (including religion) apart from large numbers of people and dollars. Church growth and strength are commonly measured by these standards. Such thinking has infected the Lord's people to an alarming degree. These surface signs of "growth" and "strength" have become so important to some elderships and preachers that they have made these an end in themselves. Several congregations are attracting large numbers of people and dollars nowadays. Gullible brethren exclaim over them: "Look how big and strong they are," or "They must be doing something right."

Who are they attracting, and to what? Often they are attracting doctrinally soft, materialistic, worldly brethren from surrounding congregations (or even some from denominations) who want to live as they please and on Sunday be made to feel “It is well with my soul.” They are attracting folks in their second (or more) unscriptural marriage who never want to be told that they are living in adultery. They are employing popular, pleasing preachers with the bait of "fun and games" that appeals far more to the flesh than to the spirit. They have mistaken a highly-structured program of constant activity (sometimes planned and promoted by a "minister of involvement") for the practice of pure and simple Christianity.

Ironically, numerical growth has convinced them that they are God-blessed. (The rapidly growing denominations are convinced of the same thing by the same evidences, by the way.) Numbers can be a wonderful encouragement and even a power in the Lord's army, but only when they are truly devoted to Him. Gideon's army (Jud. 7) should remind us that spiritual power rests not with numbers, but with those who serve the Lord, even if they are few.

Let us continue to plant and water the seed of the kingdom lovingly, boldly, and faithfully – and let God give His increase (1 Cor. 3:6). Regardless of its numbers of men or of dollars, a religious cause is utterly powerless and is even the enemy of God if it rests not firmly on the Word of God. These things being so, there is more spiritual power in only 100 saints who love the Lord and His Truth without compromise than in 100,000 whose great concern is with popular fads and trends in morals and doctrine.

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